

Trimming and Edging the Right Way



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Trimming and edging. These are the jobs that usually go to the low man on the totem pole, the rookie you don't yet trust with your brand-new zero-turn mower. That makes some sense, but it doesn't mean that you don't need to [train employees](#) on how you want lawns trimmed and edged. As with any other aspect of lawn maintenance, a high-quality finished product depends on doing the job the right way.

"You absolutely have to train employees when it comes to trimming and edging. Not just anyone can go out there and do it," says John Shackelford, owner of **Shackelford Lawn and Landscape**, outside of Indianapolis, Ind. "They think they know what they're doing, but the next thing you know they're getting too far into the ground and end up killing the grass around landscape features or trees in the yard."

Going too low and not staying even with the turf is the number one problem Shackelford sees, adding that it's an ongoing process for him to train his employees on proper procedures.

"We walk new employees through the process for the first two or three yards when they start. Then we give them a trimmer, but still walk with them to make sure that they are doing it correctly before letting them go out on their own," he explains.

Edging requires a similar hands-on training approach, Shackelford advises. His crews use [STIHL](#) gas-powered edgers with blades along the edges where lawn meets hardscaping.

"We use the most powerful heads we can purchase so they can cut through everything. Sometimes we'll use a hand spade to help cut it, but that's rare," he explains.

During the spring and summer, Shackelford Lawn and Landscape's crews edge properties weekly as part of their regular lawn service.

"We just keep it edged up every time so it always looks sharp. Once the grass isn't growing as much, we usually only have to run the edger through the yard every couple of weeks," Shackleford notes.

Around flower beds and trees, the crews use a redefiner head with an "M"-shaped blade, which digs a more pronounced trench to define the edge more clearly. At the beginning of the season, or for new properties where the beds weren't edged in the past, Shackleford turns to a powered walk-behind bed edger. Those edges are then maintained with the hand-held stick edger.

While an employee will occasionally use a string trimmer to create a clean edge, Shackleford still prefers using an edger for the task. "I can do it a lot quicker and the line is a lot straighter, and it looks cleaner and neater to me," he says.

Don Porter, owner of [Don's Lawn Care](#), Austin, Texas, agrees. "I like to use a stick edger, it produces a cleaner cut than a trimmer," he says. But he notes that some members of his crew are experienced enough that they can use a trimmer to edge and get good results. His company uses Echo trimmers and edgers.

Stay in the groove

"One of the main things I tell the guys when they are using a trimmer that way is to make sure they stay up close to the cement," Porter emphasizes. "You need to keep it in the groove rather than making the grass recede further and further away. That's one of the biggest things you'll get complaints about, that they are trenching out too much. So my priority is to keep the gap between the grass and the curb as thin as possible."

That's easy to do with a stick edger—just put the blade in the gap and go—but takes a little more skill with a trimmer, he reiterates.

One of the keys with edging and trimming is to make sure you keep up with it, says Porter. "Every time we mow a yard, we edge it and trim around flower beds, fences and sidewalks." Because it's done regularly, though, it's especially important to be careful to follow the proper lines, particularly when edging around flowerbeds, which is always done with a trimmer.

"If you edge every week you keep taking off a half-inch around a flower bed, pretty soon that flower bed is going to be huge. You just want to take off a little bit, just the part that's growing. Usually it's only about one-eighth of an inch, or less. You just want it to be enough to give it a fresh look," he states.

Similarly, when trimming grass around fences, trees and other features, it's easy to overdo it, says Porter. "If they're just starting out, guys have a tendency to take the head of the trimmer and just stick it down into the grass [almost to the ground]. And, over time, the grass gets killed." Outlines of dirt make for unhappy customers, he observes. When trimming, "you want to keep everything even with the mowing height," advises Porter.

For that reason, he favors mowing first and *then* trimming. “That way, I can see where the cut is from the mower, so I can visualize where the string needs to be in order to even it out,” he explains.

Antonio Zeppa, owner of [Zeppa’s Lawn Service](#) in Louisville, Ky., says that trimming and edging are part of the normal service that his crews provide to customers on a weekly basis.

“On landscape beds, we use a spade, basically a square shovel, to create a nice 3-inch edge. That will keep the mulch from washing out into the grass, and it will keep the grass from growing into the bed,” he explains. That is done at the beginning of each season, and then the edge is maintained weekly with a string trimmer. On bigger commercial properties, the company will use power bed edger. A string trimmer is also used to create the edge anywhere the grass meets cement.

“We’ll just turn it straight up and run down the line,” explains Zeppa. He says it usually takes a few weeks of experience before most employees have the process down. “It is tricky at first; you basically want just the tip of the string to touch. A lot of new employees will want to have it shoved down in there, which can make the whole line crooked,” he says. He says it’s easier for employees to pick up how to operate the trimmer at the proper level when trimming grass throughout the property.



Not too high, not too low

“You don’t want to be too high so it looks like you didn’t do anything; but you don’t want to be too low to where you’re scalping it,” states Zeppa.

Trimming and edging is an integral part of quality lawn maintenance, says Rocco Laurie, owner of [Rocscape Landscaping](#) in Mayfield Heights, Ohio. “For our regular customers, we include it weekly. Both edging the concrete walkways and driveways, as well as the beds,” he explains. His crews use two different tools to accomplish these different types of edging.

On anything with a concrete edge, they use a STIHL stick edger with a metal blade. “We use the metal blade on all the concrete surfaces, just to give it more of a 90-degree cut to the grass,” Laurie explains. “Some landscapers like to use their weed wackers to do these edges, but it usually doesn’t come out as perfect because it’s difficult to follow the same path. It depends on the skill level of the employee, but personally I don’t train my guys to do that, because I don’t like the look of a flat edge. I want a square edge.” He does train his employees to use a trimmer on the top of the edge, just to tighten up the grass a little bit.

Around natural beds, Rocscape Landscaping typically uses a bed edger at the beginning of each season, “just to get that edge established,” says Laurie. The company has a ReDefiner model bed edger from Brown Products for this purpose. If additional mulch is applied during the middle of the growing season, the ReDefiner will again be used to cut the edge out a little more

and to clean up the appearance.

"The sediment can fill it back in if it rains, and it rains a lot here," says Laurie. Crews monitor to the look of the edges to see if and when this more extensive treatment is needed.

Once the edges around beds have been established, they are maintained weekly with a weed trimmer. "We cut it both flat [level to the ground] and straight up and down to give it a squared-off look," he explains. "We do that around every bed and we do it every week. We don't use the stick edger on the beds because we can do a better job with the trimmer in a shorter amount of time."

Learning how to use the trimmer in this manner on the edges usually takes some training, Laurie notes. "Anybody can do it. But it's a hard task to do right," he says. "We usually start new employees off just [trimming] the edge flat, and then someone with more experience will do the straight edge by flipping the trimmer [perpendicular to the ground]. That's a little bit harder to do and get the edge to stay straight. We'll let the new employees practice a little bit, and then, when we feel they're ready, we'll let them do the whole thing." Particularly some of his higher-end residential accounts are demanding about wanting a straight edge, and it takes time for employees to be able to create that perfect edge, states Laurie.

Trimming near the edges is just as important as the edge itself to a polished look, states Laurie. He says that, ideally, the person on the crew running the mower will mow around all the edges first, so those doing the trimming and edging can work while the mower is tackling the main part of the lawn. The final step, Laurie adds, is to blow off the edges to disperse clippings or debris produced during the trimming and edging. "During the growing season, we blow off the edges of all the yards because grass gets thrown onto the mulch or the soil," he notes.